

**Worship Service of First Presbyterian Church
December 24, 2016 - "Candlelight Communion Service"**

PRELUDE

"Silent Night" by Neil Harmon

Dr. Elizabeth Davis
(adapted from Isaiah 9)

CALL TO WORSHIP

There will be no gloom for her that was in anguish.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;

Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.

Thou hast multiplied the nation, thou hast increased its joy;

They rejoice before thee as with joy at the harvest,

As men rejoice when they divide the spoil.

For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder,

The rod of his oppressor, thou hast broken as on the day of Mid'ian.

For unto us a child is born, Unto us a son is given;

And the government will be upon his shoulder,

And his name will be called "Wonderful Counselor,

Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Of the increase of his government & of peace there will be no end,

He will establish the throne of David, and uphold it

With justice and with righteousness for evermore.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Let us worship God, beginning with the lighting of the Christ candle by the Phillips family....

LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

The Phillips Family

The Phillips should be seated at the front, near the Advent wreath. There will be a lighter on the wreath. There should already be one pink and three purple candles lit. Adjust the microphone before the service to make sure it is on. As soon as you are introduced by the liturgist, step to the microphone at the wreath, remove the microphone from the stand and pass it to the first speaker, pick up the lighter, and begin reading.

Ryan: We light this candle because on this night we celebrate the coming of God into the world.

Katherine: He came to fulfill what the Lord had promised through the prophet Isaiah, "The virgin will be with child & will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Emmanuel-- which means 'God is with us'." John tells us, "For God so loved the world, that He sent His only begotten Son, that whosoever should believe in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

[*Katherine lights the Christ (center & white) Candle.*]

Ryan: Let us Pray... O God, on this most holy of nights, you took our nature upon yourself, were born of a woman and dwelt among us, that we might be born anew. Grant that by your grace we might become your sons and daughters by adoption. May we live every day of our lives secure in the knowledge of your love for us. O Come Emmanuel, be with us and dwell with us, this night and forever. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

*The Phillips will return the microphone to the stand and will return
to their seats in the congregation. Thanks for your help.*

*CAROL

"Angels, from the Realms of Glory"

The Hymnal #22

*CALL TO CONFESSION

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

(In Unison)

Dear Father in heaven, forgive us for claiming to be disciples of your Son, even as we do our best to avoid and neglect our lessons. We don't want to learn forgiveness, because we must forsake our anger. We avoid learning patience because it takes time. We do not like our lessons on love because they require us to practice on those who dislike us. As a result, we have grown increasingly comfortable in our ignorance and immaturity, refusing to grow up and act with mature judgment and experience. May we begin again, growing with the babe of Bethlehem into worthy and faithful

servants of Christ. Come among us and shine the light of your righteousness upon us exposing our hypocrisies, ignorance, and impotence. Then grant us the grace of your forgiveness so that the seeds of faith planted within us may finally bloom and yield an abundant harvest for Him who was born to save us. Amen.

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

The Good News of the Messiah's coming is for ALL people. He did not come to save the righteous, nor did he come to deliver the powerful. He came to save the forgotten, the unlovely, the lonely. And the proof of God's amazing love for us is this, while we were still sinners, Christ came... and died for us... Friends, believe the Good News!

In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven! Thanks be to God!

*GLORIA *Refrain from "Angels We Have Heard on High" The Hymnal #23*
Gloria, in excelsis Deo! Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

***PASSING OF THE PEACE**

He has removed the divisions between ALL people and God and has become our peace. The peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you.

Pass the peace with one another.

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

Hebrews 1

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. Amen.

SPECIAL MUSIC "O Holy Night" - Adolphe Adam Joanna Smith, soprano
After the soloist finishes, the preacher will return to the pulpit & say....

Each worship service of Advent we are using a short video produced by "The Skit Guys" to help introduce the morning message. This evening we will hear of The Shepherd's experience of Jesus' birth.

A CHRISTMAS VIDEO

The Shepherd

After the video, the preacher will return to the lectern & say....

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Luke 2:8-20

(Pew Bible, p.889)

And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!"

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."

And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they saw it they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child; and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart.

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Our thanks be to God!

SERMON

“The Fellowship of the Forgotten”

Rev. Mike Morgan

There’s a story about a young woman who went away to college in the fall, leaving her plants and her goldfish in the care of her mother, who had a tendency to be forgetful. Some of us may know somebody with a "brown thumb." This mother had one. The plants that the daughter left behind in the care of her mother died at the end of the month. The mother dutifully broke the bad news to her.

When the young woman called a week later, her mother confessed that the goldfish had died too.

There was a long pause, then in a fearful voice the girl asked, "How’s Dad?"

It’s no fun being forgotten. Sometimes it’s even fatal.

Nonetheless, the shepherds had been assigned a permanent place in the great fellowship of the forgotten by the rest of the world.

They were the marginalized. They had no status in their culture.

They were uneducated, smelled lousy, and were considered low-class.

During Jesus’ time, being a shepherd was a dead-end job.

They had little chance of doing anything different the rest of their life.

Shepherds weren’t evil, but you wouldn’t want your daughter to marry one.

So the Shepherds worked day after day at a hard, thankless, and DANGEROUS job. It was their responsibility to protect the sheep from robbers and wild animals. But they were, after all, expendable.

Spiritually they were on the social rung just above leper. They were considered unclean. They couldn’t participate in feasts and holy days. They regarded were so low by the rest of the world that they were not permitted to give testimony in court.

Yet it was to these outcasts that an angel brought the first proclamation of the good news. If earthly kings and queens and heads of state gave birth to a new member of the family or future head of state, I would imagine they would go to political players-- princes, presidents, potentates, and prime ministers. Aristocrats, the famous. Stars, artists. stars. They certainly wouldn’t worry about sending them out to carnival workers, drunks and addicts, truck drivers, or trash collectors.

Yet, there in Bethlehem was born the King of all kings, the Lord of all lords, God visiting our planet this once and only once. One Son of God, no other births, no other announcements to be given out. This was it. This was the biggest event in human history. And the mayor of Bethlehem doesn’t get the announcement. The High Priest in Jerusalem is left out of the loop. The Caesar and the members of his Royal court are don’t get the news. None of the officials, none of the power elite get the announcement.

The palace doesn’t hear, the temple doesn’t hear, Jerusalem doesn’t hear.

This birth announcement that God gives out goes to a group of Sheep herders on the outside of Bethlehem.

The question quickly arises, Why? Why the shepherds? Why not more noble recipients of this glorious news? Why waste it on shepherds?

For to YOU this day in the city of David is born to YOU- a Savior.

God intentionally used the Overlooked as messengers of the Good News

These sheep herders that receive the angelic announcement, were not necessarily the mild-hearted, clean cut altar boys, one might imagine. Shepherds were borderline social outcasts. They didn’t fit in with the culture. Because they were always traveling and moving with their sheep, they didn’t have much of a home life.

They were wanderers, drifters in a society that didn’t have much room for people like that. Shepherds had the reputation, whether fairly or not, as being thieves. They couldn’t be trusted. They were a little shady. You didn’t want them counting the offering!

They lived and moved around with sheep. They didn't look good, They didn't smell good. They were crude and harsh in their language. Uneducated and unsophisticated men.

They were also Religiously Unclean. In Jewish tradition to fully participate in the religion you had to undergo certain rituals and attend certain festivals and services to be considered clean, acceptable to God. Because of a shepherd's work schedule and constant migration, they could not attend those regular services and perform the necessary ritual of purification. Thus, Shepherds were religiously unclean.

A person in right standing with God was not to touch a shepherd, lest they too become unclean. They were not allowed to go into the temple. When they did show their faces at the temple, they got 'those looks.'

You know those looks. You don't belong here. What are you doing here? What is your kind doing at our Church? God doesn't have a place for you. Clean yourself up. When you gonna make something out of yourself?

That who the shepherds were. Outcasts. Overlooked. Ousted by the religious establishment. Not good enough for God, so they were taught.

So it was for them and all the members of the fellowship of the forgotten that the message from the angel came. It was for the overlooked of the world that heaven lit up and the announcement came. God threw the switch and displayed the heavenly Christmas lights for the overlooked.

He does this for two reasons.

First, God intentionally uses the overlooked as messengers of the good news because that way God gets all the Glory.

You see God doesn't play power games with people. God doesn't deal well with inflated egos. By using people that the world considered second rate, God further displays his power. The people were amazed at the message and that shepherds could actually herald this amazing message. Shepherds don't normally know this kind of information. So--- God gets the glory.

Sixty years later, Paul would write to the Corinthians, "Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

.... Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things- and the things that are not- to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

Some years ago David Robinson, who at the time was the All Star leader of the San Antonio Spurs, visited a church on Xmas Eve. You can imagine the stir when that seven-foot figure walked into church. People mobbed him. Everyone wanted to get his autograph and shake his hand. When the pandemonium finally settled down, the preacher stood to do the announcements. Just then a homeless man walked in the back and came down the center aisle with his backpack, ratty jeans, and torn T-shirt. His face was unshaven, and he had a distinct odor. He walked down to the front and sat down.

The contrast was striking. When David Robinson entered, he was immediately swamped. People wanted to touch him and be close to him. Nobody jumped up to sit next to the homeless man. After two or three awkward minutes, one of the elders got up from his seat and sat by the man. When the peace was passed, he shook his hand and gave him a hug.

The message sent and received that morning was, man may play favorites, but God does not discriminate on the basis of intelligence, education, wealth, profession, political power, or social standing. In fact, he makes a special effort to remember and reach out to the fellowship of the forgotten.

The overlooked that first Christmas, who were remembered and honored by God were shepherds. And nothing in the last 200 years has changed the fact that he continues to reveal his glory to those who have been forgotten or ignored by the world.

And when we reach out to them, we reach out to Him. And if we would remember and honor Him, we can not forget them.

The fellowship of the forgotten today come in many forms.

They are the elderly, outcast, and homeless.

They are the unappreciated and challenged.

They are the untouchable, the addicts, and the diseased.

They are convicted felons.

They are the battered wives and neglected children.

They are migrant workers.

The Good News of Christmas is for all people. All are invited to "come and see." By the grace of God, each one of us is welcomed here.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Gracious God, once more we have heard your great good news for all people. Having seen your light, having heard your word, having praised your name, help us to take this good news of great joy to all people. Open our hands and hearts to receive and serve you as our King, and then open our mouths so that we may share the love you have revealed to us, and the hope you bring to all people.

To the sick, may we speak words of healing and hope.

To the lonely, may we be signs of God's loving presence.

To the poor, may our acts of kindness offer assurance that God's love is free gift for all.

To the disbelieving, may our lives be confirmation that God really is with us, in the flesh.

Be known to us now, we pray, in the bread and cup. Consuming these elements may we take you in and offer you the highest place in our lives. Take command of our minds and hearts that we may be totally and forever devoted to Christ, who taught us to pray saying....

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done; On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

(In Unison)

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done; On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

CAROL

"It Came Upon the Midnight Clear"

The Hymnal #38

THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Invitation

Come - this is the table of the one who was born in Bethlehem for us. Come and receive the gift that he offers us - his body broken and his blood poured out - for ALL -- that all who believe may be made whole.

The Words of Institution

On the night in which we was betrayed, Jesus took the bread and broke it and gave it to his disciples saying, "take, eat, this is my body, broken for you.". In like manner, when the meal was done, Jesus took the cup, and after giving thanks, offered it to his disciples saying, "take, drink, this is my blood, the blood of the new covenant for the forgiveness of sins. As often as you do this, do it in remembrance of me."

These are the gifts of God for the people of God.

The Distribution of the Elements

Communion will be served tonight by intinction, Starting with those in the front pews, each worshiper is asked to come forward by way of the center aisle, receive a piece of bread, dip it in the cup, place it in his/her mouth, and return to your seat by way of the outside aisles. If you would have difficulty coming forward, please remain in your seat and the elements will be brought to you.

The Prayer After Receiving

Lord Jesus, we have gathered here this night to remember and give thanks, and to ask your forgiveness for forgetting those we have overlooked and forgotten. Having received of your body and blood, given so freely that we might live eternally with you, help us rightly to remember your birth of Jesus, that we may share in the song of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds, and the worship of the wise men.

Close the doors of hate and open the doors of love all over the world.

Let kindness come with every gift and good desires with every greeting, and teach us to be merry with clean hearts.

May this Christmas Eve bring us to our bed with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven. And may Christmas morning make us happy to be thy children, to your eternal glory. Amen.

THE SHARING OF THE LIGHT

The ushers will pass the light from their candle to those seated on the center aisle. It is important that lighted candles not be tipped. Once your candle is lit, you are asked to pass the light of Christ to the person seated next to you. As the light from candles is passed from one to another, worshipers are asked to keep lit candles erect and to dip only unlit candles.

As the ushers begin passing the light, the minister will say...

“Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

“I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness.”

“While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.”

Would you join me in the Litany of the Light printed in your bulletins...

THE LITANY OF LIGHT

(adapted from John 1)

In the beginning was the Word,

And the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God.

All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing was made.

What has come into being in him was life,

And the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness,

And the darkness did not overcome it.

The true light, which enlightens everyone, has come into the world.

And to all who received him, he gave power to become children of God,

And the Word became flesh and lived among us,

And we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.

THE SHARING OF THE LIGHT

*CAROL

“Silent Night, Holy Night”

Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and child, Holy infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night, shepherds quake at the sight;
Glories stream from heaven afar, Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia!
Christ the Savior is born, Christ the Savior is born!

Silent night, holy night, Son of God, love's pure light;
Radiant beams from thy holy face, With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth, Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.

Silent night, holy night, wondrous star, lend thy light;
With the angels let us sing, Alleluia to our King;
Christ the Savior is born, Christ the Savior is born!

***THE BLESSING**

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep YOUR hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of Jesus Christ our Lord, through the power of the Holy Spirit. And may He bring you the most blessed, and merry Christmas ever. Amen.

***THE POSTLUDE**

Dr. Elizabeth Davis